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Testimony by Representative Pam Sawyer

Education Committee

Senate Bill 1015

March 9, 2009 1:30 Room 2B

Good afternoon Chairmen Gaffey and Fleishmann, Ranking Members Caligiuri and Giuliano, and Members of the Education Committee. Today, I am here to testify in opposition of Raised Bill 1015, An Act Concerning Members of Local Boards of Education and Repealing of Minority Representation Requirements for Boards of Education.

First, I would like to express my opposition to the language of this proposed bill that would eliminate minority representation on town boards of education. I am particularly concerned with the language in lines 43 through 46 of this proposed bill. Currently, local boards of education are required to reserve a certain number of seats for minority parties. This safeguard is in place for a reason- to ensure that boards of education are not governed by one single party. If passed, this bill will effectively silence the voice of minority party members on boards of education across the state. In fact, it would only allow for one voice, one view point, and one opinion on matters of importance before our towns boards of education.

Lines 18 through 22 of the proposed bill are also troubling to me. While I understand and appreciate the importance of having an unbiased local board of education, I have some reservations about the process by which a non-partisan board of education may evolve into a partisan board. While the language of the bill is unclear, it is my understanding that a person may petition himself onto the ballot for a position on the town's board of education and in doing so, will not reveal his party affiliation, nor will his party affiliation be on the ballot. From what I understand, this is done to ensure that voters make their decision not based on party affiliation, but on principle and a candidate's message. While this seems to be an unbiased process on paper, I have doubts that it will be failsafe.

Our students will no longer have the benefit of a variety of voices and opinions on education policy- instead of a multitude of opinions on education issues, healthy discussions and debating, a single-party board of education will be the sole decision maker in our towns. I'm sure you will agree with me that the education of our children should never become a decision made along party lines, and this proposed bill would begin the practice of one party making one decision.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today. I am available to take any questions you might have at this time.